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ABSTRACT

This profile in outline form of the English language teaching situation in Uruguay discusses the role of English within Uruguayan society and within the educational system. Though English is quite widely used for reading scientific, technical and medical publications, and while it is considered important culturally in higher professions, it is not widely used as a medium of communication in the country. There is no language instruction at the primary level, but English is taught both at the secondary level and at the university level. Curriculum and programs of study are described, as well as the status of teaching personnel and teacher training. Also discussed are textbooks and materials used, English instruction outside the educational system, and British and American support for the teaching of English. A very brief bibliography of relevant research concludes the profile. (CLK)

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ENGLISH-TEACHING INFORMATION CENTRE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

August 1977

Country: URUGUAY

1. Role of English

Educationally, Uruguay may claim to be the most advanced of the 20 South American republics. It has a tradition of, and reputation for, educational excellence. Having been settled almost entirely by Europeans, it takes an active interest in European culture, including British, at a sophisticated level. Until quite recently, it had a thriving and influential Anglo community, which played an important role in the cultural, commercial, educational and recreational life of Montevideo, and to a lesser extent, of the country as a whole. Although the Anglo community has diminished in the last decade or so, its impact on the country continues to be felt. Through the Anglo-Uruguayan Cultural Institute (AUCI) with its 25 regional branches, the British Schools and various Anglophile clubs and societies, interest in Britain is still maintained; English is used extensively in each of these. Interest in the cultures of Britain and the United States has created further interest in the English language. And in a society of fewer than 3 million, in which there are insufficient job opportunities for the professional classes of doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers and agronomists, mastery of English is frequently regarded as the sine qua non for postgraduate study.

1.1 Spanish, not English is the medium of instruction in Uruguayan schools.

1.2 English is used quite widely for reading scientific, technical and medical publications, at University and postgraduate levels.

1.3 English is not widely used as a medium of communication within the country.

1.4 It is, however, considered important culturally and in the higher professions. Uruguay is also frequently the venue in South America for international conferences in many fields, for which English is a major language of communication.

2. English Within the Educational System

There is no language instruction at primary level. At secondary level English is taught for 3 periods of 40 minutes for either 2 or 3 years; there is a movement towards decreasing the time allotted to modern languages (French as well as English) in order to make more time available in the schools for scientific subjects; this is naturally unpopular with language teachers, and may not be put into practice. Pupils planning to read scientific subjects at the University may learn some English for this purpose in their last year in school. The pilot schools which were introduced following the educational reforms of 1967 in order to provide opportunities for English to be taught more intensively have ceased to function in this way. According to the Education Reform of 1976, there are formal public Examinations in the 5th and 6th Years of the Liceo course; failure in English in the 6th Year blocks entrance to the University.

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Teachers may choose the textbooks they prefer from a list drawn up by the Inspectorate of English which is responsible for inspecting schools throughout the country, assessing the competence of teachers, advising on teaching methods and establishing the curriculum. At tertiary level short courses are provided to enable students to read scientific, technical or medical texts in English and a 3-year Public Translators course is available. Within the Faculty of Humanities of the University of the República Oriental del Uruguay, English studies form part of a 5-year course in Foreign Languages. The first 2 years of this course are mainly given over to the study of Greek and Latin. Having passed in these subjects, a student may specialise in English, French, Italian, Spanish or Linguistics. This system is new, but appears to be working well. In 1973, the former lecturer in English Literature (the Director of Studies of the AUCI) whose work in the Faculty of Humanities had been discontinued for political reasons, was invited back to his post by the Dean and two years later his post became the equivalent of a University chair. Despite the shortage of books and the varying levels of language proficiency of students electing to specialise in English, there are grounds for hoping that the department will produce steadily improving results. Within the Educational system English is taught to adults only in technical colleges.

3. Teaching Cadre

Quantitatively, the supply of teachers may be said to meet the demand. Apart from a large number of trained teachers, many professionals in other fields where few employment opportunities exist resort to teaching, or combine it with another professional pursuit. Qualitatively, this can only have a detrimental effect on standards of instruction.

3.1 The majority of local English teachers are Uruguayan. A small percentage are Anglo-Uruguayan, born in this country of 1 or 2 British parents, and hence completely bilingual. A smaller percentage still are British expatriates or expatriates of other countries, such as Poland, Austria, Germany and Armenia.

3.2 Many Liceo teachers are graduates of the former 4-year Instituto de Profesores Artigas (IPA). However teacher training now consists of a 3-year course and the IPA has become part of a centralised system for the training of teachers at primary, secondary and specialised primary levels. The former IPA is now called: Centro II del Instituto Nacional de Docencia "General Artigas".

The competitive written and oral exams plus a practical class ("concursos") have not taken place for at least seven years now and it is possible to become a Liceo teacher without having very definite qualifications.

3.3 i. The 3-year course at Centro II gives training in : Language, Phonetics, Applied Linguistics, Methodology, Literature, History and Laboratory work (all these in English) and General Subjects (in Spanish) such as, Sociology, Testing, History of Education, General Pedagogy and Educational Regulations.

ii. There are two training courses at the AUCI. The longer one is a 1-year course of 12 hours per week, comprising Language and Linguistics, Methodology, Phonetics, Visual Aids, British Literature, British History, Oral Practice, Laboratory. All instruction is in English, and there is an enrolment of about 15 per year.

A second 1-year course of 4 hours a week was established in

1976 to give an introduction to the teaching of English as a Foreign Language to promising candidates with a high level of English who for financial or other reasons could not attend the longer course.

iii The Alianza Cultural Uruguay - USA also offers a teacher-training course, with main emphasis on the spoken language.

iv In conjunction with the Alianza, and the Inspectorate of English the AUCI also organises a bi-annual 2-week summer school to provide in-service training for Uruguayan teachers of English and, on its own, a winter school for the staff of the Institutes. The 1977 course was attended by 245 teachers.

3.4 The Asociación de Profesores de Inglés del Uruguay holds monthly meetings in the AUCI, at which invited speakers lecture, in English, on relevant subjects. National membership, previously in the hundreds, currently stands at about 50. One reason for this decline in numbers is that formerly the APIU organised the January summer school, under the sponsorship of the British Council, USIS and the Consejo Nacional de Enseñanza Secundaria y Preparatorio. This activity is now run jointly by the AUCI with British Council assistance and the American Alianza.

4. Teaching Materials

4.1 There is no shortage of textbooks, but the high cost of books in Uruguay limits the number of new courses in use. There is a shortage of other ELT materials and equipment - projectors, recorders, record players. The 1967 reforms places greater emphasis than formerly on visual aids, but teachers are expected to provide their own.

4.2 There is a pattern of diversity within the liceos where the textbooks most widely used are:

New Approach to English
Situational English
Steps to Spoken English (Longman)
English Alive
Access to English (OUP)
Talking in English

4.3 Some basic do-it-yourself visual aids are used in the schools and some teachers borrow speech records and tapes from the AUCI; a few borrow films.

4.4 There are no local projects relating to the production of teaching material.

5. English outside the Educational System

5.1 The two largest and most important organizations teaching English in Uruguay outside the state system are the Anglo-Uruguayan Cultural Institute (25 regional institutes) and the Alianza Cultural Uruguay - USA (30 regional filiales). The Montevideo Institute offers English instruction to Cambridge Diploma level, to some 8000 students (5,500 children and juniors, 2,500 adults) and the regional institutes cater for another 9,000 to proficiency level. The Alianza instructs about 4,500 students in Montevideo.

Both the AUCI and the Alianza are highly regarded locally, and receive the support of the Enseñanza Secundaria for such activities as their joint, annual summer school. For many Uruguayan teachers, this provides the only in-service training which they receive, and, with the APIU the only forum at which they can listen to native speakers of English. The AUCI is a self-financing, private educational and cultural organisation, controlled by a board, and directed by a British Council officer. (Up till the end of 1977, when the post will probably become an EFL one).

In addition to its own examinations at various levels below FCE, the Montevideo AUCI prepares students for FCE, CPE and Cambridge Diploma in English Studies. It also organises Advanced Oral Classes and English for occupational purposes as required.

The Montevideo AUCI has a library, originally partly financed by the British Council, of about 18,000 books, and a 275 seat theatre, where plays and films are shown in Spanish and in English.

5.2 The growing number of smaller English teaching Institutes and the great numbers of private teachers testify to the strength of the demand for English in Uruguay.

5.3 There are several private schools in Montevideo which use English as the medium of Instruction. The most important of these are the British Schools, the Crandon Institute, St Catherine's School, and Queen's Institute. The senior section of the British Schools give instruction, in English, in all its subjects, including Maths and Science, to International Baccalaureate and GCE A-level and O-level. The Crandon offers courses in commercial English. St Andrew's Schools instructs children, in English, from age 3-14.

5.4 Two former British Council scholars, Mrs Consolandich and Miss Cusmanich are setting up a 'Tutorial and Information Centre for English Teachers' (TICET) to give information on English Language Teaching and to organise short courses to up-date those teachers in both public and private sectors who may have done their training many years ago or who may never have had any serious training. Such a Centre is certainly needed and given a little time may be very useful.

6. British support for the teaching of English

6.1 i One Council officer is Director of the AUCI until the end of 1977; thereafter the directorship will probably become a "formula" post.

ii There are 3 British Council contract teachers at the British Schools teaching subjects other than English in English.

iii One British (private) volunteer is working in the Regional Institutes.

6.2 Key posts held by British staff:

i Director, Anglo-Uruguayan Cultural Institute (Until end 1977)

ii Headmaster, Head of Maths Department, Head of Humanities Department, Senior School, Head of Junior Schools.

iii Assistant Director, St Catherine's School; Head of St Andrew School; Director of Studies, the Anglo-Uruguayan Cultural Institute.

6.3 The Director of the AUCI is responsible for the Institute's cultural and academic affairs - teaching, teacher training, non-financial administration, theatre, library, language laboratory, visual aids, staff administration, suburban annexe, summer and winter schools, etc. Currently she is the local secretary of the Cambridge Syndicate.

The Director of Studies at the AUCI is responsible for the adult section of the Institute. This post combines some direct teaching with administrative work. He is also Professor of English at University of the República Oriental del Uruguay.

6.4 At the 1977 Summer School, January 31 - February 11 1977, held in the Montevideo AUCI book exhibitions were mounted for Longman, Oxford University Press, Heinemann, Macmillan. Three British Council English Language Teaching films were shown. The British visiting lecturer Miss Janet McAlpin was a Council Specialist Tourist.

The use of 'Steps to Spoken English' is being gradually phased out in the AUCI and Regional Institutes; it is being replaced by 'Access to English' OUP. The V8 course, for children, continues in use and is found to be very satisfactory.

A team of illustrators in the Montevideo AUCI has now completed comprehensive sets of visual aids for use with 'Access to English'.

6.5 All the texts used in the AUCIs are published in Britain as are those used in most of the State Liceos and many of the private schools. The AUCI has lending libraries of British books, tapes, films and gramophone records, all of which are widely used. British films are sometimes shown commercially in Uruguay.

6.6 The Director of the AUCI is mainly engaged in teacher-training but teaches adult classes from time to time.

7. American support for the teaching of English

See above 3.3 iii, iv, 5.1. It is now generally agreed that the Anglo-American Summer Course is best held every other year, mainly to prevent excessive weariness of the local staff. Relations with the Americans are at other times friendly, but not close.

8. General Statement

8.1 In the private sector, the standards of teaching in the Montevideo AUCI are high, those of the interior less so. State teaching standards are not yet properly professionalized, and are accordingly, sometimes poor, although some of the teachers are eager to improve. Many classes are too large and some pupils lack interest in English.

The low salaries paid force teachers to teach in more than one school, or to take private pupils, and the present political system leads to a sense of unease among the more thoughtful teachers.

8.2 A central strength of the Montevideo AUCI is its team of senior teachers, responsible to the Director, and in charge of one or other of the principal activities in the Institute - the teacher-training and visual aids programmes, the language laboratory and tape library, the V8 programme. Each of these teachers is British trained and capable of training teachers, through the in-service training programme and the summer-winter schools. It would contribute to the continued well-being of the Institute, and hence of English teaching in Uruguay, if their number were not merely maintained but increased on a regular basis. One of the teacher trainers at the AUCI, for example, also teaches in the Teacher Training College (Centro II) and two other members of the Centro II staff have had postgraduate training in Britain with Council Scholarships. The fact that the Director of the Institute will from 1978 no longer be a Council officer makes it all the more important to ensure that Council (or ODM) Scholarships should be regularly offered to Uruguay if the present standards of teacher training are to be maintained.

Current Research and Bibliography

The significant changes made in the Uruguayan state schools have been documented in:

Aquiles Guerra, En Torno a los Programas Renovados de Inglés. 1963
Nuestra Enseñanza Secundaria en el Momento Actual. 196?
La Reforma de la Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés Aplicada en el Liceo Piloto Uruguayo 1967

If this profile is more than a year old further up-to-date information may be found in ETIC Archives.